

MSXDEV 15 FINAL REPORT

MSXdev Team

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MSXDEV 15

JURY

Gameplay	David Fernández		
Graphics	David Fernández	Paco Santos Ramírez	John Hassink
Sound and FX	David Fernández	Maarten van Strien	
Polishing	David Fernández	Bart van Velzen	
Originality	David Fernández		

RATING

There is a range of points from 0 to 9 and also **0.5 points** as bonus that can be added or not as the juror wishes.

The extra points are shown in the table of each game only if they are higher than 0, in which case they are colored in red.

As you can see in the table above, *David Fernández* is the only juror involved in the 5 categories evaluated in this contest. The rest of the jury members give their points according to the category which they are designated.

Also, comments and explanations about their rating can be found for each of the four games.

DONATIONS

MSX UK	50€
Santiago Ontañón	€50
@apolovald	€20
Fran Pino	€50
Marco Frissen	€82
Anonymous	€150
Javi Lavandeira	€35
Óscar Toledo (@nanochess)	€15
AAMSX	€75
	€544

PRIZES

In this edition of the contest, we have **three different prizes**. The total amount of money, kindly donated by MSX lovers, will be distributed as follows:

- **Best Game → €300**

This prize goes to the game that obtains the highest average rating in all the categories (*gameplay + graphics, sound, polishing and originality*).

- **Best Graphics → €122**

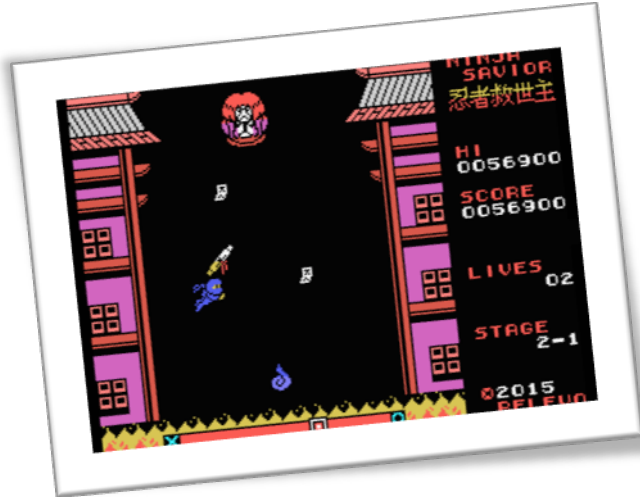
This prize goes to the game that obtains the highest average rating in the *graphics* category.

- **Best Sound → €122**

The best music and FX prize goes to the game that obtains the best average rating in the *sound* category.

RATINGS AND COMMENTS FROM THE JURY

NINJA SAVIOR



WINNER OF BEST SOUND PRIZE: 8

	David	Paco	Maarten	John	Bart	
Gameplay	5				5	
Graphics	7	6 + 0,2		8	7	
Sound	8		8		8	
Polishing	6				7	6,5
Originality	7					7

6,7

DAVID FERNÁNDEZ SAYS:

It's an easy to play game, although it lacks some complexity to avoid monotony and to make it more interesting.

The game makes a good use of SC1 mode. Graphics are cute, as usual in Relevo productions.

Music is one of the game's strong points. It's really "Goemonesque", making the player feel like being in the japanese medieval age. FX are fine.

The overall game is pretty solid, although there are a few issues (FX don't sound good sporadically, and boss graphics are displayed again for a moment after being killed).

There are already some "accurate jumping" games around, but Relevo's implementation seems quite original to me.

PACO SANTOS SAYS:

The most balanced game of the contest, polished in all aspects. Game mechanics are a bit simple and repetitive however.

MAARTEN VAN STRIEN SAYS:

My first impression of this game, musically speaking, was: "well, Konami would've been proud on this one!" And now about a month later this hasn't changed at all. What sets the music of this game apart from many other games, is that it closely follows the Konami formula from the late 80's.

It delivers clever writing without doing too much, and without leaving unused potential behind. 'Doing too much' means something like cramming bass, drums, arpeggiating chords and melody all into three channels.

Typical scene chiptune territory so to speak. For instance, when listening to Usas, all I can think is: "Konami didn't need all that zealous trickery, they could perfectly cope with only three channels and made music that ranks amongst the best." The same method applies to Ninja Savior. It's really good three channel music that doesn't need to be more than three channels. The title/story reminded me of the ending of Usas, while the in-game music is kin of Goemon.

The score of 8 is well earned, and really based on a straight 8. No averages based on 'this is this and that is that', just a simple and plain score.

JOHN HASSINK SAYS:

Very clear and crisp graphics, along with a consistent and polished overall look. The animated pyre on the bottom of the screen actually serves a function in adding to the experience of playing the game, as it invokes a sense of urge. The fact that it keeps burning (animating) when the sub-stage is ended, only improves upon this.

The visual difference between the main stages' environment is represented by a simple palette change while the tiles and the layout remain exactly the same, but as the game is supposed to take place in a single particular village, and as it has no actual effect on the gameplay, this isn't really problematic.

The same goes for the fact that the enemies only have two animation frames; it doesn't take away from the general look, but even considering the limited ROM size, it still feels like a bit of a missed chance.

In spite of the typical ninja-themed 8-bit games adopting a 'chubby' cutesy look, the creators of this game obviously went

for unique designs of both player and antagonists.

There is a visual cue to signal a succesful hit on the enemy, and even a modest 'explosion' effect upon its defeat, which both expand the visual quality of this game as well as it works quite satisfying.

Conclusion: a cleverly and tastefully designed production. The game name being written in Japanese Kanji characters on the title screen is a nice extra touch.

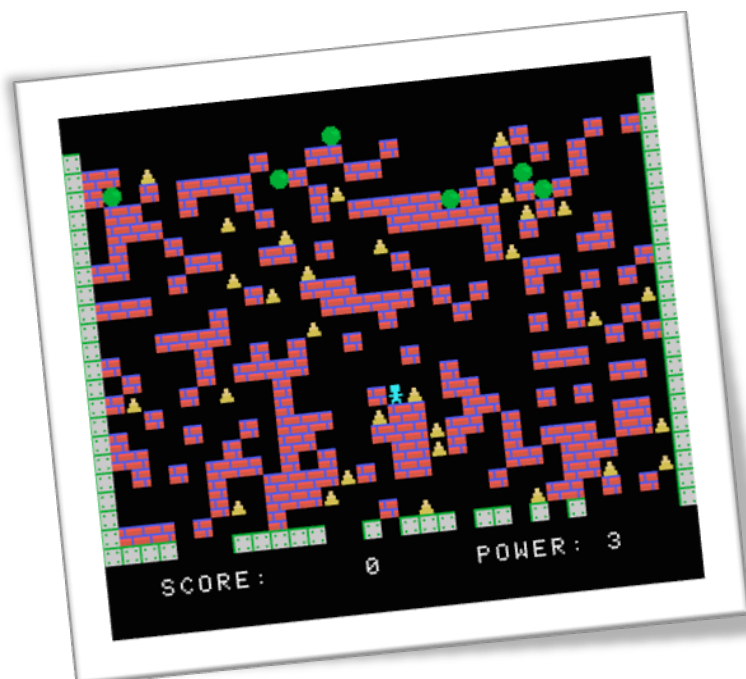
BART VAN VELZEN SAYS:

Nice transitions between logo, title screen, story line, and in-game.

Only 4 sprites are used. More sprites could have been used for extra detail in the enemy characters.

The fire at the base of the houses has a black background, instead of blue. Additional animation tiles (or sprites) would have been nice. You can't pick up paper spells and scrolls after you have been damaged; not sure if thats intended. Small grammar mistake in the storyline: "under attack of".

BUBBO WORLD



	<i>David</i>	<i>Paco</i>	<i>Maarten</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Bart</i>	
<i>Gameplay</i>	4				4	
<i>Graphics</i>	3	3		6	4	
<i>Sound and FX</i>	2		1		1	
<i>Polishing</i>	5				4	4,5
<i>Originality</i>	5					5

3,7

DAVID FERNÁNDEZ SAYS:

Simple and crazy gameplay. It's a bit difficult to predict the bubbles' behaviour and, sometimes, also to find the player's location after using the warp option... so don't expect to play long games, as you will die very often.

GFX are simple, even using the MSX default font. It really feels like those old basic games listed at paper magazines.

There are just a few simple FX in the game. No music at all.

Everything seems to work okay, however, there's nothing that stands out.

This kind of platform games are not original at all, but creating ladders and the bubbles thingie throw some fresh air to the concept.

PACO SANTOS SAYS:

Very simple game in all aspects but taking into account the size of the ROM it deserves a least a positive comment.

MAARTEN VAN STRIEN SAYS:

Look, it's not like a 1 out of 10 at high school, but it'd be fair not to award anything more than that for just a few simple beeps. Even if I'd give a symbolic 4 points, it'd still have to explain the composer of Ninja Savior why Bubbo World was at least half as good. I wouldn't be able to do that anyway.

So let's simply agree that this game was never made to impress with sound. Doesn't mean the game itself isn't amusing, but that'd be a different corner of the jury room. :-)

JOHN HASSINK SAYS:

Very minimalistic but adequate graphics. It's a straight-forward game with graphics that fit that exact philosophy. Having said that, a closer look reveals some subtle details which make this game a bit prettier to look at and more fun to play.

To be mentioned in this regard are, for instance, the ladders which actually are visually built upwards in front of your eyes, instead of (what may have been easier, or lazier to program) simply being 'calculated' beforehand and instantly appearing as a whole. Or that the main character actually has a cute looking running animation. The 'warp' animation is strangely exciting to behold as well, although that may have to do with the anxiety of where on the map you will re-emerge.

It's also nice that the game utilizes a dedicated text font and multi-coloured tiles.

However, the general look of the game, in terms of movement, could well be described as a decidedly chaotic one, which is mainly due to the rapid, seemingly erratic movements of the 'bubbos', and the fact that they move per 8 pixels. It can actually be dizzying, at times.

As stated before - the graphics serve their purpose, and not much more.

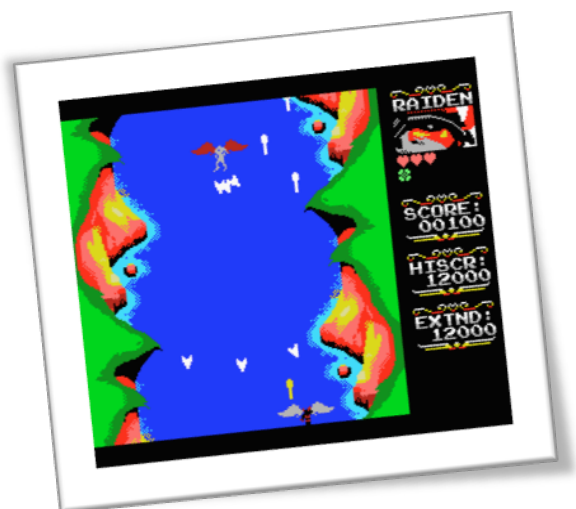
Conclusion: It is what it is, and what you see is what you get.

BART VAN VELZEN SAYS:

No fancy graphics, no intro, no story line, just plain and simple gaming.

The green blobs moving randomly and rapidly left and right looks a bit chaotic.

WING WARRIORS



WINNER OF BEST GRAPHICS PRIZE: 8,2

	David	Paco	Maarten	John	Bart	
Gameplay	6				6	
Graphics	8	8		8 + 0,5	8,2	
Sound	6		7		6,5	
Polishing	7 + 0,1				6	6,5
Originality	6					6

6,64

DAVID FERNÁNDEZ SAYS:

Control response is good. The game is quite easy and too short (the first time I played I reached the last boss, and the second one I defeated him). Great effort made to include lots of bullets, but that makes the game suffer from serious slowdowns.

Good work regarding pattern based GFX (those main character portraits are very nice too), but enemy sprites are not that good. There are also sprites visibility problems because of the background GFX (bearable in stage 2, but serious in stage 3).

Music is okay, and the few FX do their job.

Everything seems to work okay, apart from the aforementioned slow-downs, however, there are things that make you feel the game was planned to be bigger & better, but that it has been finished in its current status to meet the deadline.

We have already played lots of vertical shooters, but it's nice to play the role of those "angel like" characters, each of them with their own story.

This is the only game where I used the bonus points, just to break the draw with 'Ninja Savior', because I think 'Wing Warriors' is a more ambitious and complex game.

PACO SANTOS SAYS:

*A pure old-school shooter with nice features like vertical scroll.
Negative assessment because of the lack of FX sounds.*

MAARTEN VAN STRIEN SAYS:

The score 7 is based on two components: 8 and 6. First, the 8. It's decent large scale music, not just a typical loop of some thirty seconds, and I can always appreciate that. The music in this game shows it has a certain scale, for the music minded listener there's really something substantial to chew on. At the very least it opens doors to cover versions.

Art is all about the detail, and within music it's all about performance. The performance of the music in Wing Warriors could've been more detailed, more alive, more articulated. A vibrato here and there, a volume envelope, some detuning here and there to prevent identical notes (even when octavated) creating a phase-locked sound... it would've greatly improved the presentation of the music. As it is now: great musical concepts, but with a static performance. Hence a 6, bringing the average to 7.

JOHN HASSINK SAYS:

Vibrant and imaginative general look. The portraits and - more importantly - designs of the three different player characters are varied and distinct, a boon that survives the transition to the in-game graphics really well.

The three stages also all have their own unique look and feel, while the colour layout of every single one of them ensures that both player character and its enemies, as well as their projectiles, are effortlessly discerned from the background. There are some exceptions, however, such as meeting slow moving and ground-based, but purple-coloured enemies on a red backdrop, but considering the restrictions of the MSX1 palette, this is passable.

Adding up to this, the enemy's projectiles rapidly alternate in colour, and look very different in shape from your own shots, making it all the more easier to navigate, avoid and tackle what is basically a projectile stand-off.

Obviously, quite some thought has been put into avoiding problems as mentioned before, while still keeping it all very colourful and varied.

A special mention has to go to the beautifully animated flapping wings of the main characters and some of the enemies. Although it ofcourse doesn't influence the gameplay, it's really pretty to look at, and boosts the already attractive graphics of this game.

Despite of all this, the actual map designs of the stages may appear to lack variation. Again, this doesn't have any effect on the game itself, but the wary player (or observer) may notice this.

Dispatched enemies leave the screen with an explosion sprite animation, that, even being it the same hardware sprites for any of them, works well.

Another downside: the flickering effect when landing a hit on an enemy, yes, any enemy, apart from the boss fights, merely works distracting and is really unnecessary; not to say, undesired.

Bonus points for, essentially being a 'bullet hell' game designed for MSX1 machines, showing remarkably few slow-downs or sprite flickering (they occur, but not disturbingly so), which can be addressed to clever use and mixtures of hardware and software sprites, and some really solid coding.

Conclusion: an intense looking game with clearly a lot of heart put into the designs of the characters, enemies and stages, but with some flaws.

BART VAN VELZEN SAYS:

Killing the first boss takes a lot of time, could have been a little bit less strong.

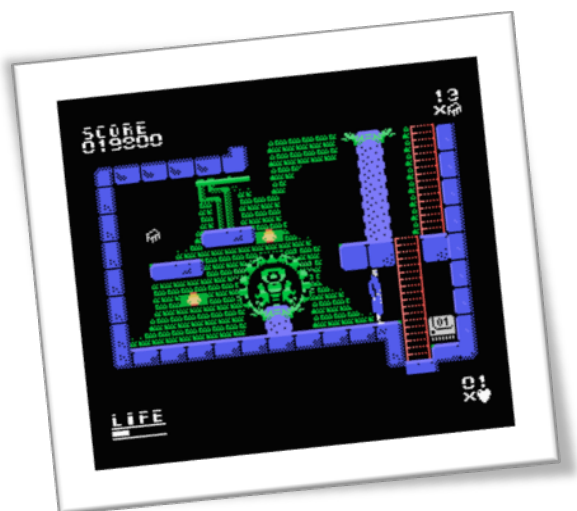
Level 2, getting killed by enemies coming from behind (I never could have seen that coming).

Music keeps on playing when game is over. No game over tune.

Hitbox of player is incorrect (you die on the right side of main character, but not on the left side).

Sound FX 'hangs' in between screens.

BITLOGIC



WINNER OF BEST GAME PRIZE: 6,79

	David	Paco	Maarten	John	Bart	
<i>Gameplay</i>	7				7	
<i>Graphics</i>	7	6,5 +0,3		7 +0,5	7,1	
<i>Sound and FX</i>	6		7,5		6,75	
<i>Polishing</i>	8				6	7
<i>Originality</i>	6					6

6,79

DAVID FERNÁNDEZ SAYS:

Control response is very good. Not allowing the player to jump is a risky design decision, but it adds a puzzling touch to the game. However, not allowing the player to crouch makes the player totally vulnerable to little enemies nearby, because they can't be killed and sometimes they can't even be dodged, what is a wrong design decision IMHO.

Scenario GFX are good, recreating a cool dark atmosphere. Regarding sprites - while the player is well done, some of the enemies don't reach the overall quality.

There's only one tune in the game and it's ok. Regarding FX, they are scarce... Maybe I miss some more here and there.

The overall game is pretty solid. Everything seems to work perfectly.

This kind of platform games are not original, but the cyberpunk atmosphere and the no-jumping & puzzling features add some originality to the game.

PACO SANTOS SAYS:

Great atmosphere achieved and color selection in accordance with the storyline. A nice platform game.

MAARTEN VAN STRIEN SAYS:

A whole different ballgame compared to Wing Warriors or Ninja Savior, musically speaking. While it leans more on the chiptune side of things, it's executed quite well.

The in-game tune has a drive that's quite catchy, slightly reminding me of Michael Jackson's Smooth Criminal, but hey.

Above all, the music is a perfect match for the somewhat strange and mysterious atmosphere in the game play. It's very hard to compare apples and oranges, and that's what BitLogic and Wing Warriors are. On the most basic level, Wing Warriors has the scale, yet BitLogic has the performance, the mood and the fun.

Purely because of that I'll give it 0.5 bonus point added to the regular 7 score, resulting in a 7.5 score. Just keep in mind that I had my brain cracking over this game vs Wing Warriors, musically.

JOHN HASSINK SAYS:

The graphics nicely convey an appropriate atmosphere. The designs ooze taste and a sense of style. The slightly avant-garde text font, the "Matrix"-like effect of 'code' running in the background during the introduction - it all synergistically works together in creating a whole different, interesting world for the player to immerse in.

Although the backgrounds in the beginning of the game (especially when venturing underground) can look a bit repetitive, later parts show, for instance, very pretty and interesting vistas of skylines rich with futuristic buildings. The fact that the ICs to be collected slowly sway up and down is a nice touch and a useful visual hint to the player.

A downside is that the enemy sprites, while serving their purpose, are not very interesting to look at. They sometimes almost seem to be absorbed by the background, even while they are differently coloured.

Also, most of their movement patterns, while adhering to oldschool platforming lore, seem rigid and stilted. It's open to interpretation whether they move that way because they are

pre-programmed robots, or if this 'feature' actually breaks the general atmosphere of the game. Some, for instance, slight sinus movement would have added more life to the entire package.

On the other hand, dispatching of an enemy droid looks somewhat satisfying, as they shortly appear to be malfunctioning, or short-circuiting before disappearing (which in turn is a downside; they literally just vanish upon defeat).

Another point that has to be touched briefly is the more or less funny looking sprite when Bit (the main character) fires his weapon. Generally, the sprites (and their animations) used for Bit are quite good.

Bonus points for two things.

First off, for the great title screen. But especially for, considering map design, the extra effort that seems to have been put in the lightfall and shadows that light sources (such as streetlights) should or should not cast, making the in-game world look even more convincing (as strange as this statement may seem when addressed to an 8-bit 'cyberpunk' game). It works really well and contributes to the general impression.

Conclusion: Obviously made with a vision, which succeeds, as it shows the intended cyberpunk feel all over. How this game looks, and moves, is already a success, but absolutely eligible to improvement.

BART VAN VELZEN SAYS:

Nice usage of sprites in the intro. Unfortunately no music during the intro or in-game (the final version will have an ambient soundtrack in-game).

Grammar mistakes at the start of the game: "I dont know what is there", and "nice! good shoot!".

Unfortunately, the intro demo when you start the game cannot be skipped.

The in-game graphics create a really nice atmosphere. At the end of the intro, sprites disappear first and only then, the rest of the screen.

Really nice and smooth interaction with ladders. The player instantly locks onto a ladder when transitioning between walking and climbing.

STATISTICS

These lists are made for info only.

TOP GAMEPLAY

1. BitLogic
2. Wing Warriors
3. Ninja Savior
4. Bubbo World

TOP POLISHED GAME

1. BitLogic
2. Ninja Savior | Wing Warriors
3. Bubbo World

TOP ORIGINALITY

1. Ninja Savior
2. BitLogic | Wing Warriors
3. Bubbo World

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, the MSXdev Team would like to thank the participants in this edition of the contest. We greatly appreciate their effort in developing videogames for our beloved MSX standard.

Congratulations to all the participants. We hope to see you again in the next edition of MSXdev contest.

We also would like to give a big thanks to the jury members for their work in commenting on all the games.

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